TEF Provider Submission Swindon College UKPRN: 10006463

Provider Context

Swindon College has origins tracing back to 1843, when technical educational classes for employees were started by the Great Western Railway Company. The college was formally founded in 1904. Swindon College is a medium-sized general further education college based on one large campus near the town centre; located centrally, the college serves the local communities in, and around Swindon. In 2017-18 approximately 7000 students were attending the College with 430 studying on programmes of Higher Education.

The Higher Education provision offered by the College is longstanding with a focus on delivering excellence in teaching and learning. For almost ten years the College has retained membership of the Associate College Partnership with Oxford Brookes, offering a range of Level 5 and 6 franchised Foundation Degree and Honours Degrees, it also has a validated Level 6 course with the University of Gloucestershire. The College has maintained directly funded courses for many years, and these offer part-time and full time study options awarded by Pearson.

The college is pleased to welcome students from diverse backgrounds, and highly values the role of education in inspiring and promoting skills in employment and further study. We are committed to raising aspirations and encouraging student's participation in Higher Education, a key objective for the local area given that Swindon was designated a 'cold spot' by HEFCE (2014). The College focus is on working to enable students to develop a high skill level which in turn, support the development of economic growth. The College is part of a group of Colleges and Universities working together (National Collaborative Outreach Programme) on targeted projects and events to raise aspiration and increase participation. To date we have taken part in events held in the local area, raising awareness of the higher education available, and we are shortly hosting a large event specifically targeted at Year 12 and 13 students from in and around the Swindon area who will engage in 'hands-on' activities to raise awareness of the possibilities of working in a variety of professions in the medical and scientific sectors.

The HE student cohort at Swindon College is predominantly mature (63% 21 or over), often with non-traditional or low entry qualifications (58% low or non-tariff), students are often already in work and have caring responsibilities alongside their studies. A large proportion of our students are drawn from areas of least participation in higher education, the TEF data shows 72% are recruited from POLAR quintiles 3 and below. Students studying higher education at the college are predominantly from

the Swindon area with 67% classified as local. This is significant as according to a recent South West Local Enterprise Partnership (SWLEP:2018) report, 'a large proportion of students who grew up in the SWLEP area, leave the area for study, and don't come back for employment' however, the report also notes national evidence that 'students are more likely to stay and work locally if they have studied locally' and so the college aims to improve the net local graduate talent available by providing excellent higher educational outcomes for our students.

The proportion of males and females has become more balanced over the last year with 54% females and 46% males in 2017/18 compared to 60% females and 40% males in the previous year. This compares to national rates of 57.5% female and 42.5% males (Universities UK 2018). This increase in male participation is mainly the result of increased recruitment in Engineering Professional courses, where students are predominantly male, which correlates to the higher than average proportion of students studying part time (35%), despite a decline in this mode of study nationally.

The College was successful in meeting all UK expectations in all four areas of the Quality code in their Higher Education Review (HER) in 2014, conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency. Areas of good practice highlighted include; strong support for students' progression through all levels of HE; comprehensive screening process; and pro-active mutual relationships with awarding bodies and organisations; and in the work done to support the employability of students.

Teaching Quality

Student Engagement

The College encourages students to be partners in the review and continuous improvement of teaching and assessment practices. Students engage in Student Experience Forums in each Semester of their studies, where the focus is on Teaching and Learning and Assessment. Students participate in active discussions about their experience, and actions are taken and reported back to the groups by the Head of Department. Student Representatives are present at the Programme Committee meetings, where the actions proposed or taken as a result of their feedback are discussed and recorded.

> *"Teaching is good and tutors have a wealth of knowledge and personal experience to share. Relevant staff are consistently on hand to provide feedback and encourage the progression of coursework." (Current year 3 BA student)*

New Starters Surveys are also employed to ensure that students are successfully inducted to their courses, and have all the necessary information to give them a good start to their course. The College employs a distinct HE induction process to meet the needs of the students and the awarding bodies involved which gives attention to the academic, pastoral and personal needs of the students, ensuring they settle in to their course group as well as the wider college environment. During this Induction period, students will have a visit from the HE team and Study Support

Officer to ensure that students needing additional support are engaged from the outset and all students have initial assessments to identify any learning needs quickly so that support can be put in place in a timely manner.

Surveys conducted during their programmes include NSS, and a mid-year internal survey resulting in programme level action plans, which are monitored with programme leaders and heads of department, and included in annual review.

Overarching action plans are discussed at Senior Leadership Team meetings, and Quality and Standards Committee of the Board of Governors. Common issues highlighted through this process in the past year have led to changes in study days/times, the inclusion of a student kitchen in the HE Common room, and the facilitation of an additional HE dedicated space with the inclusion of a HE study area within the Library area.

Module evaluations are completed by students and Module Tutors, and students present their feedback at Programme Committee. This enables students to be engaged with the content of their course, and to understand where changes are to be made as a result of their feedback.

A high level of student support is facilitated by the smaller class sizes, enabling tutors to gain a good understanding of the individuals in their groups. Tutors are then able to understand the context in which students work and study, and can ensure they can create a teaching strategy which maintains the students' interests throughout each Module and uses relevant industry/sector examples. Students' progress is regularly monitored using our E-trackr system, ensuring that each tutor as well as the individual student, can access academic tutorial, pastoral and support information, adding to the overall engagement and experience of the student in all elements of their study journey, including setting personal targets.

The College firmly believes, as discussed above, that engaging students in all elements of their study journey, removing barriers to learning, and recognising individual needs is key to student success and retention. This is supported by the positive continuation metrics at 91.4%, 4% above the benchmark of 87.4% for full-time.

Due to this high level of support and meeting the needs of individuals, retention and achievement across all HE programmes has also been consistently high:

Year of enrolment	**Achievement**	**Retention**
15-16	87%	88%
16-17	80%	85%
17-18	97%	98%

Attendance also remains positive being 85% across all HE programmes in 17-18, in line with 16-17, but with most programmes averaging 81-98% in 17-18. Effective timetabling and knowledge of employer requirements enables the college to be responsive to our students' commitments regarding their work and caring responsibilities, which is becoming increasingly more crucial as we continue to recruit to Higher Apprenticeships, where attendance both at college and at work

carries a mandatory requirement of hours. Here we find student attendance is at the top of the range quoted.

Valuing Teaching

Swindon College is committed to delivering high quality teaching for its students and understands that to achieve this a culture of continuous improvement is necessary both in subject expertise and pedagogy. The college requires staff to achieve a recognised teaching qualification at level 5 or above and supports this through both financial support and remission from teaching whilst in the training phase.

Staff engage in sharing best practice across the regional College and University sector, with staff members taking part in external staff development sessions and events as members of the Associate College Partnership, for example taking part in an introductory session at the Annual ACP Conference, and doing a presentation at another college for their staff development day.

The college also supports staff to achieve academic and professional qualifications or undertake specific training that will benefit their teaching activities. All of our current teaching staff have either achieved their teaching qualification or are currently working towards it. We also appreciate that industry experience and currency is valued by our students and approximately 65% of our tutors either still currently continue to work in their respective industries, or have left the industry or undertaken higher level study in the subject in the last 2 years, or have completed recent professional updating to maintain their currency.

> *"The teachers are amazing, all of our teachers have a personal passion for the subject, which shows and makes lessons interesting and engaging, also meaning that the teachers themselves have a lot of knowledge, which they are eager to share with the students."-Student Comment BA Graphic Design NSS 2018*

The College has three members of staff who operate as Learning Coaches, these are practising teachers who have 50% remission from their teaching commitments in order to support the development of teaching, learning and assessment across the college. All three have experience of teaching and assessing HE students. The Learning Coaches are automatically assigned to work with new members of staff whether they are new to teaching or not, and will support them with all aspects of teaching and course management until there is confidence on both sides that the quality of provision is as required. Existing members of staff can also access support from the coaches by self-referring or support may be requested by a line manager as a result of concerns raised either through a learning walk or observation or from student feedback.

> *"The teaching quality is extremely good."*
>
> *"Good quality lectures, well laid out. Very good materials provided and feedback" Student Comments FD Business, NSS 2017*

The Learning Coaches also provide training sessions and write the 'Learning Matters' Newsletter which is written once per half term to support all staff in developing their teaching, learning and assessment practice and covers topics such

as how to support students particular needs, stretch and challenge techniques, good questioning technique, effective feedback for students and so on.

The College has a formal non-graded observation programme which is focussed on the development of teaching, learning and assessment. Each session must meet minimum requirements, the emphasis is on opening up the dialogue between the observer and the observed, identifying good practice that can be shared, and practice that can be developed further to improve the student experience. Each individual agrees a Personal Development Plan with their observer. Learning Walks also contribute to raising the standard of teaching and learning and these are undertaken on a regular basis to ascertain the quality of the sessions; they may be targeted as a result of student feedback. Both these activities feedback to the Vice Principal Quality who collates themes, from the strengths and weakness identified, by curriculum area, and for the college overall, and these themes then inform tailored staff development activities for individuals and groups.

Over the last few years the college has adopted a number of strategies to stimulate innovation and development in teaching and learning practice. The use of Lesson Study has enabled lecturers to experiment with new ideas to develop the skills and knowledge of their students, for example, to develop professional literacy skills in students, to establish successful methods of improving results of memorising, and to identify activities that work well for flipped learning. Communities of Practice (COP) were developed in 17/18 to encourage greater cross curricular collaboration and sharing of practice. HE colleagues discussed and explored 'the Student Voice', other COP's were focussed on topics such as Learning Technology and Growth Mind-set. For 2018/19 Action Learning Sets have been introduced in addition to COP's to allow staff time to share any issues and challenges they are experiencing in their teaching and assessment practice, and use their collective knowledge and experience to suggest and commit to strategies to overcome these issues.

The College has seen an overall increase of 6% in the NSS section relating to the 'Teaching on my course' in 2016-2017 which has been sustained in 2018, showing that this is an area of continued improvement. The College has made concerted efforts to analyse and understand our student feedback, and implement strategies as a whole to improve the student experience. We are continuing to identify and recruit staff with suitable skills and knowledge for delivery of HE and to support current staff to extend and develop their knowledge and skills. We consistently receive feedback from our students on how much they value the teaching staff as part of their overall course experience, this can be seen when examining individual student comments from the 2018 NSS, and the comments below are a selection all taken from different programmes:

> *'The teachers are well informed, deliver the content really well, and are always happy to help when you do not understand'.*
>
> *'The tutors are a credit to the course, they genuinely want to help us and are extremely knowledgeable in all areas of our practise, and they are always approachable and allow us to contact them via email even outside term time'.*

> *'I have really enjoyed myself on this course and I find the subjects interesting. The tutors are very supportive and are always there to help and support you, if you need it'.*

Further positive feedback from students regarding how much they value the teaching can be seen in EE reports, for example:

> *'Students were also very positive about the teaching and learning agreeing that staff had good vocational and industry experience. Teaching staff were available to give support and guidance relating to all areas of their studies, including assessment, study skills and academic writing skills' G Hargreaves 6.6.2018 EE Report HND Performing Arts (Production)*

> *'Students on both the FDA programmes were initially concerned about changes in staffing but in both cases praised the new staff for their energy, commitment, enthusiasm and for very quickly ensuring a seamless transition' G Brennan19.6.18 EE Report FdA Creative Arts Practice.*

> *'The staff are a clear strength of the course and it was commented on by students how valued they were. They used phrases like 'amazing', 'staff are exceptional' and 'don't want to leave', which clearly indicates staff commitment and skills. The students also commented on how they feel they had been stretched and achieved due to the efforts of the staff and the culture and environment that has been created' G Ambrose-Gordon 18.7.18 BA Graphic Design*

<u>Rigour and Stretch</u>

Course design, development, standards and assessment at Swindon College are effective in stretching students to develop the independence, knowledge, understanding and skills that enable them to develop to their full potential.

Course design has to meet the rigorous standards of our awarding bodies both at the validation stage and during the periodic review processes. During our most recent validation experience for our top up year for the BA (Hons) Advanced Make up, Hair and Prosthetics the panel from Gloucestershire University commended the Swindon college team for:

> '*The exceptional quality of the student experience, as based on the feedback from the meeting with students'* and '*The effort that had gone into drafting the documentation and which had been of an excellent quality'. (2018)*

To ensure that courses are valid and quality is maintained or improved, all courses undertake an annual self-assessment process which starts with Review and Improvement Day in July and culminates in a written Annual Monitoring Report with full developmental action plan by November. This process focusses on all aspects of the course, utilising student feedback mechanisms, module reports and team discussion to reflect on the changes required to improve and develop the programmes. Internal quality is also scrutinised by our awarding organisations, Oxford Brookes University, Gloucestershire University and Pearson.

Entry tariffs for our courses are well below that of the traditional university sector with 58% of our students entering with low or non-tariff qualifications. The College is well placed to understand the needs of learners and can support their transition into HE

effectively. A combination of high quality teaching, small classes, tutorials, effective targeted feedback and wider support help our students to develop their study skills, become more independent and critical in their thinking and graduate with good grades despite their low starting points. The table below demonstrates the high percentage of students who obtain higher grades on their qualifications.

Item	2016/17	2017/18
% of students completing the course with a successful outcome	80%	97%
% with a 'good' degree	59%	43%
% with merit or distinction on FD	60%	61%
% with merit or distinction on HND	75%	84%

Rigour in terms of grading, is maintained by robust internal (and external with University partners) moderation and external examination processes, in addition to further monitoring of marks and results by the awarding university.

The NSS 2018 result for students agreeing 'my course is intellectually stimulating' was 87.04% against a sector wide level of 84.49% and for 'my course has challenged me to achieve my best work' 81.48% against a sector level of 81% demonstrating that tutors are making students really think about their studies, and promote a positive environment for development and personal achievement. These results also demonstrate that we are above or in line with other institutions in terms of pushing them to work to their best ability.

> *"The course has increased my confidence in my academic abilities and my underpinning knowledge for work."*
>
> *"The course is interesting and does feed into my workplace well. The course has pushed me academically and overall I am pleased I am on the course."*
>
> *Student Comments Fd Health and Social Care, NSS 2018*

<u>Feedback</u>

Feedback to students is crucial to enable them to become assessment literate, understanding how to use feedback to improve future work, not just by learning from what they have previously done, but through understanding their own needs and seeking help when appropriate.

The College has continued to drive the importance of both formative and summative feedback, exploring both within the Assessment Regulations (2017) so that staff and students can better understand the importance of these.

External Examiners regularly positively comment on tutor feedback, both in terms of its thorough content, and it being developmental and encouraging to the student.

> *The assessment process is clear and all the students I spoke to understood it fully. There is on-going formative feedback within weekly tutorials and critiques.*

Feedback is informative and contextual and it relates to both academic and professional standards.

(External Examiner- Graphic Design 2017)

The metrics for assessment and feedback show results which are improving quickly, they are 6% up year on year but are slightly behind benchmark (-3.3) for the 3 years. An increase in satisfaction was seen regarding the NSS Assessment and Feedback questions. In particular 'timely feedback' and 'helpful comments on my work' saw an excellent increase of 10% and 9% respectively. The upward trajectory in this area is the result of a series of focussed initiatives to help students to understand the range of feedback they receive, and the points at which they are receiving feedback to help them to improve. We are continuing to ensure that written feedback on assignments consistently meets the college or awarding organisation guidelines for student feedback, sharing best practice and examples across our teaching teams.

"The teachers are honest and offer constructive criticism and encouragement in a great balance allowing us to develop our work effectively and achieve the best grades we are capable of and develop our skills as designers" Student comment BA Graphic Design NSS 2018

"We have good one-to-one time with tutors and help us constantly get feedback when needed" Student Comment BA Illustration NSS 2017

Learning Environment

Resources

The College has supported the development of HE spaces, both for the use of all HE students, and defined spaces within curriculum areas.

The students benefit from a HE Student Centre, providing a Common Room, with social space and kitchen facilities, a PC room for independent study, and a large study room adjacent to the library facilities. These facilities have been well received by students as commented on in the recent round of Student Experience Forums:

"HE Study Room is great." HNC Mechanical Engineering (Year 2) 2018

"HE study room is a great addition to the college, enables students to feel more comfortable with some suitable background noise from the TV. Air conditioning is an added bonus." HND Mechanical Engineering Nov, 2018

"New HE room is working well this year" BA Education & Lifelong Learning Nov, 2018.

The new HE study room was provided as a result of HE student feedback which noted that the Learning Centre is a busy and well used space across the College and students studying on HE programmes sometimes found it too distracting to work there. In response, a large room with desk space and PC's has been provided. This area also accommodates some of the key text books for each programme allowing

students to research and study in a HE designated area, with easy access to the library and support staff within it. These shared HE areas allow students to meet and work with students from other HE areas, encouraging a HE community, also allowing for social events to be planned and advertised to all.

The College also invested in the construction of a skills lab to support the students learning in Health and Social Care, a growing area which includes an apprenticeship route. This allows for assessment, observation and examination in a mock clinical environment, mirroring that which the students are used to in their workplaces.

In addition to this on site facility, students also have access to the University facilities located a short distance from the college, for study, as well as organised visits during which students can participate in lectures and other course enhancements offered, such as the PGCE conference held at Oxford Brookes, recently attended by our students.

In other specialist areas such as Art and Design, students benefit from HE spaces and studios which allow them access to industry standard facilities for ceramics, printmaking, and photography for example, as well as a MAC suite. Students have their own designated studio spaces and storage for their work and equipment, which fosters a community of creative practitioners, able to learn and develop throughout their course, and this encourages collaboration across disciplines.

Engineering professional courses provide students with excellent facilities and resources reflecting those found in the industry, and the ability to apply their learning directly and practically. Specialist software such as CAD, and testing, manufacturing and diagnostic equipment assists students' skills and development.

The College has also invested in new hardware and systems to improve the I.T network, including Wi-Fi, and all HE classes have access to Smart Screens for teaching, as well as providing a 'development hub' where students can work together and use IT in collaboration for assessment, for example presentations, with staff on hand to support if needed.

Scholarship, Research and Professional Practice

The College encourages and supports all staff who are new to teaching, or who have not previously undertaken a qualification, to do so. The sessions are timetabled to enable the release of staff to attend each week, and these staff are allocated a mentor; someone more experienced from within the college to provide support and guidance to get the best from their studies.

Many of the lecturers at the college have a vast amount of teaching experience, and many are still practising in their field. This enables the staff to maintain currency in their delivery to students, ensuring lessons reflect the most up to date practices to ensure that students are ready for employment and will be able to operate confidently within the workforce.

For those staff who have been teaching for some time, the scholarly activity policy supports them to go back into industry for professional updating opportunities, conduct their own research, or attend conferences, exhibitions or other professional

development opportunities, beyond a 'same day' event which would be usual CPD practice. For example, a member of staff in Art and Design was successful in gaining experience in South Africa to be part of a team undertaking standardisation of assessment practices, bringing back to her colleagues at College some new creative ideas and experiences, as well as further opportunities for collaboration.

These staff opportunities are always assessed on the basis of the value to the professional and how this might enrich the practice of others including the students. Through the dissemination of the experiences to colleagues and students, the students are gaining a valuable insight into the value of scholarship and research and how it can enrich their individual practice as professionals in their field.

> *"The tutors are a credit to the course, they genuinely want to help us and are extremely knowledgeable in all areas of our practise" FD student NSS 2018*

> *"Teachers that have lots of personal experience with the real world aspects of the course have helped us to truly understand the professional world we are about to enter." BA student NSS 2018*

Regular reviews of Modules by students and tutors enable staff to research and refresh the lesson content based on the feedback provided. HE sessions follow a programme of study, and a more detailed lesson plan for each session. Staff are encouraged to use this as a working document, reflecting, noting, adapting and changing as necessary, as they gain new understandings about the topic, and take on board feedback from the students to inform future sessions.

Staff value the students input and students are encouraged to share their own learning and professional experiences as well as signposting articles and books that they have found useful through their own research, to enrich the class discussions

> *'There are strong bonds between the students as a group, and with the teachers as mentors. We all respect each other and enjoy working together and learning from each other." BA student NSS 2018*

Staff are encouraged and supported to be reflective practitioners through opportunities for professional discussions with Learning Coaches, to try out new technologies, organise supportive observations and to be part of the HE COP to share experiences and support colleagues in enhancing their professional competence and confidence, thus having a positive impact on student learning and development.

<u>Personalised Learning</u>

Our HE programmes benefit from having relatively small class sizes which average 10-15. This enables our lecturers to get to know their students well, and therefore they can tailor their teaching to ensure it is relevant to the student cohort, including examples from practice which students can relate to and recognise, and are able to add to the debates and discussions about these topics.

> *"Tutors are very supportive, they take time to explain what is being taught and offer encouragement" Student comment- FD Health & Social Care. NSS 2018*

Lecturers hold regular academic mentoring tutorials, which form part of the hours for the Modules. These are a platform for student and lecturer to discuss progress in the Module, and discuss how the assessment is progressing. Students get individual formative feedback, and areas for development are identified, as well as providing the opportunity for the lecturer to signpost other means of support, or for the student to self-refer to the HE Study Support if they find themselves in difficulty with their studies.

> "*The teachers are well informed, deliver the content really well, and are always happy to help when you do not understand".*
>
> *Student comment- FD Early Years, NSS 2018.*

The College uses E-Trackr, which is an electronic progress checking system, to record tutorial conversations in summary, and to ensure responsibilities and actions agreed are clear, as well as noting any concerns that may have arisen. This acts as an aide memoir to the student, who can access and review this information, but also as a means to share relevant progress information with other key staff members. This ensures that all staff involved in the teaching and pastoral care of the students, have clear records of their progress or concerns, so that a personalised and consistent approach can be taken.

If a student is deemed to be at risk of not completing their course due to poor attendance, personal issues or academic concerns, the student can be referred to sources of help or advice.

The circumstances of each individual are taking into account when deciding on Mitigating Circumstances, Hardship Support entitlement or instigating the 'At Risk' process. This is a three step process designed to engage the student in support, with an aim to removing individuals' barriers to learning, where possible, to enable them to continue their studies through to completion.

Many of our students are returning to education after a break in studies; some a significant length of time. We understand that a large proportion of our students have learning difficulties which may have gone undiagnosed, or unrecognised in the past. We carry out short screening exercises with all new entrants in the first 4 weeks, to identify initial indications that a student may have a learning need or difference which could require support. For those identified, an initial appointment is made with the HE Study Support Tutor (SST) to discuss the students' individual needs.

The HE SST, can then give advice to the student and the staff teaching team on making any adjustments to support the student needs. Some students quickly learn self-help strategies to overcome their difficulties, with the support of the teaching staff. Many students access personal support sessions on a regular basis throughout their studies. Again this helps to remove barriers to learning and gives the students a personalised approach to their studies, to support them towards a successful outcome.

Our continuation metrics are excellent and validate the support and personal growth provided to our students, as the indictor for full-time students is at 91.4%, 4% above

the benchmark of 87.4%, producing positive flags for 'first degree' and 'BME' students. For 'first degree' this is statistically at the 3 percentage point level showing high levels of continuation. For part-time students, continuation at 88.6% against a benchmark of 73.6%, a difference of 6.6% resulting in a positive flag overall, and in each reportable area of the splits. Combined with high retention levels (98% 17-18) this demonstrates that the College is successful in ensuring students stay on their programmes and progress through each level of Higher Education.

Student Outcomes and Learning Gain

Employment and Further Study

Course content has been written with input from employers in that sector/industry, through Pearson, or consultation during the writing phase of the FD or BA, ensuring that students gain knowledge and understanding directly relevant to employment. Assessment has expectations on a comparable level to those in a workplace and professional standards are a key part of the expectations set by our lecturers.

All courses aim to develop the individual to be able to understand how to learn, research and develop their study behaviours. Lecturers will make reference to the next level of study, and give examples of how students can extend and challenge their own learning to undertake higher level study.

> *"The Research module, although scary and difficult, is a fantastic introduction for individuals such as myself who are wanting to progress to the BA year." Student Comment FD Early Years NSS 2018*

Many of our students commence their studies whilst in work, attending one or two days a week, part-time, or are being supported by their employer to study at college one day a week, being released from work. This is especially true of our Engineering Professional cohorts, who mainly study part-time HNC's in Civil Engineering, Construction or Mechanical/Electrical/Electronic engineering subjects. Here LEO data supports that for part time study (Year 3 metric) those in sustained employment or further study exceed the benchmark of 90.5% at 94.5%, demonstrating that these students continue to work and study three years post-graduation, making a significant contribution to employers and the economy.

Employers will often support these students financially as well as through day-release, and they will gain promotion within the company on completion. A proportion of these students will go on to study higher levels at their chosen University.

> *"I have been thoroughly impressed with the lecturers throughout the course and the range of topics covered. I started the course with little knowledge of software and limited contextual knowledge but will be leaving the course after three years, ready to join a professional workplace with confidence in both my technical abilities and my theoretical knowledge." Student comment BA Illustration NSS 2017*

In Health and Social Care areas, students are studying with the support of their NHS Trust and will complete a Higher Apprenticeship. Posts are created as Band 4 Practitioners, and students are often working just below this level on commencement of their studies, working towards this higher level post on completion.

> *"I feel I have had a good start to ensure I am well equipped to progress in further studies."*
> *Student Comment FD H&SC NSS 2018*

Cohorts within Educational Practice and Early Years, are often established practitioners who wish to gain validation of their knowledge and experience by completing a Foundation Degree. Of these, approximately 70% will continue on to a Level 6 year to gain a full honours degree. Some will wish to progress further, and are advised and supported to apply for initial teacher training routes, assisting them in accessing further study, to ultimately progress into professional teaching roles.

The above examples are evidence as to the outcome of the metrics displayed for 'Highly skilled employment or further study', demonstrating that at -6.8% against benchmark, many of our students are not seeking to change their employment as a result of their studies, but gain recognition, promotion and validation of their experience and knowledge in their chosen career area/path. However, they may move into more skilled positions after gaining more experience, confirmed by the LEO data explored above in relation to part-time study.

Our full time metrics also demonstrate a continued improvement in 'highly skilled employment or further study' with a year 3 metric of 72.8% above the benchmark of 72.4%, demonstrating rapid improvement (10%) on the previous year. The continued emphasis on employability and embedding skills within our programmes, in addition to students experiences in the workplace are a factor in this increase. Locally one in four people of working age have a level 3 qualification, with 80% already in work, providing potential for upskilling in order to address the skills gap at Level 4 and above in the area, and prepare the employees needed to fulfil skills shortages reported by local employers. As recent analysis of workforce projections for Swindon, by occupation, show a continued trend toward higher level jobs, and the college intends to continue work to support this area.

Destinations data (DLHE 2016/17) confirms that our students tend to work mainly in the Swindon, Oxford, Gloucestershire or Bristol areas, earning an average salary of £20,000. Although we have seen a decrease in full-time employment from the previous year, this is more than compensated by the increase in part-time employment and further study, and a drop in unemployment.

In the case of our Art and Design students, many will gain employment in junior positions initially, work in small enterprise, 'start-ups', or set up as freelance practitioners. Working in the creative sector is competitive and will often take several years to establish as an artist. We have seen some extremely successful outcomes for students in the creative industries that would not meet the definition of 'highly skilled' employment within the timeframe of measure, such as successful authors, illustrators, artists, and theatrical make-up artists and prosthetic designers working in

film, television and the West End but these do not currently fall into the three categories from the Standard Occupational Classifications (SOC) used for this metric, nevertheless are occupations of great value to the creative sector.

Employability/Transferable Skills

Swindon College has always ensured that courses embed employability skills, provide experiences of real work scenarios, and prepare students for work and further study; an area of good practice highlighted by QAA. (HER 2014)

All of our HE courses provide students with the key knowledge required to succeed in their chosen field, and this is supported by staff who are working in, or have recently worked in the industry. Staff are able to guide and give insight into working practices, and help students to gain a deeper understanding of underpinning theory, make links to their own practice, and drive forward personal and professional growth.

Many courses include work experience, such as Graphic Designers who are working alongside an enterprise project, gaining real work experience as part of their learning and assessment preparation. All courses in Art & Design and Engineering Professional courses use 'live briefs' which replicate the requirements of industry, and promote graduate attributes in planning, organisation, working to schedules, using industry standard materials to produce outcomes and produce work for real scenarios. Examples of this are wig making and theatrical make-up and costume design, which is exhibited in a live show, and art installations which form part of an external professional exhibition, both attended by employers from the industry. In engineering advanced Maths supports assessment such as fault diagnosis, and soil testing for civil engineering for example, as well as encouraging problem solving skills. HND Computing students digitally designed a 'wrap' for an advertising campaign, working on a brief designed by a local Mercedes dealership, who took part in several guest lectures to prepare the students for this opportunity.

> *What all programmes, through the curriculum, supported was an ability to help students to gain confidence in themselves and to have the potential to go on to building a form of sustainable practice beyond simply employment or having been "trained" for specific roles.*
>
> *(EE FD Creative Arts & Design Practice)*

Employers regularly come into college to give students sessions which provide greater insight into the roles and careers they can pursue, and what skills and attributes they as employers are looking for in their employees. Industry led talks and guest speakers who can make direct connections to the workplace form a valuable part of the colleges work to prepare students for employment, both in a professional sense, and in terms of practical strategies for writing an application, interview techniques and so on.

Positive Outcomes for all

Of the students studying Higher Education at the College in 2017/18, 97% achieved a successful outcome. A significant improvement in higher grades was also achieved

at Level 5 for both HND and FD, with 84% and 61% respectively, achieving a Merit or Distinction grade.

With a high proportion of our students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, (72% POLAR quintile 3 or below) and 58% of students entering HE courses with low on 'non-tariff' qualifications, the College is proud to be able to add significant value to the starting points of these students, enabling them to achieve positive outcomes.

Considering also that 63% of our students enter at 21 years of age or above, teaching and learning has to take account of prior experiences of education and sometimes low levels of confidence in their own ability. Lecturers and staff at the College are able to deliver high quality teaching with a focus on employability, and provide high levels of support and mentoring to develop each individual. Students are encouraged to recognise and believe in their own potential with lecturers scaffolding their learning and building knowledge, competence and confidence with the individuals needs in mind. The high attendance (85% 17-18) and high retention (98% 17-18) demonstrates that students want to be at College and value their experiences enough to stay even when times are very challenging for them.

On entry to higher Education, 16% of students declare an additional need, which can be a physical or mental disability or learning need. Many are supported through DSA, and a further 10% are identified through initial screening or self-referral. These students are having support from the HE Study Support Officer, who can provide support targeted to each individuals' need, and can provide a safe environment for students with conditions such as anxiety and depression to get the help they need. On occasion students are also referred to other sources of support within College such as counselling, or external services or agencies, ensuring that all students can access the help and support that they need to address or remove barriers to learning.

The College has served the communities of Swindon and surrounding areas for many years, and with 67% of higher education students classified as 'local', it is clear this is still the case. The College has a valuable job to do in offering higher education locally, to improve participation, upskill the local workforce and help to reduce skills gaps, widen participation across socio-economic groups, and try to improve the retention of skilled and knowledgeable local people to work in and around the locality. Work with local and regional employers will continue to ensure that their needs are met in developing and training workers for the future, supporting the local economy and raising aspirations within families for future generations.

The College is currently working with a wide range of employers and educational stakeholders including two LEP's, with expertise from two Universities, in a bid to secure an Institute of Technology (IOT), which will open up further opportunities for local delivery of employer focussed Higher Education in Swindon, providing opportunities through links to 5000 employers in Swindon, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire. The IOT will provide employers with relevant local courses and opportunities for training and upskilling to ensure the predicted number of highly skilled jobs in the area are filled by knowledgeable, work-ready, local candidates to meet their business needs into the future.